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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted by the Speech Communication Association (SCA) Task Force on Career Opportunities to obtain and disseminate information about the skills required for a variety of jobs in nonacademic settings and nonteaching jobs within academic settings. Forty-two SCA members responded to a questionnaire in which they listed their job titles and descriptions, identified their jobs as entry or nonentry level, and ranked up to seven required skills for both their jobs and related entry level jobs. The skill most frequently mentioned was writing, with 83% of the respondents citing some form of writing such as letters, memos, reports, speeches, proposals and grants, and news releases. Other skills mentioned in order of decreasing frequency were speaking, interpersonal or small group skills, research skills, organizational ability, listening skills, analytic ability, general management skills, supervisory experience, and knowledge of a particular corporation or industry. Other information elicited by the questionnaire included skills required on entry level jobs and sources of skills both from formal course work and from on-the-job experience. Among the conclusions drawn from the reponses were that career options should be explored before graduation, that curricular changes for speech communication majors may be required, and that internships will be a critical component of the speech communication curriculum. (AEA)

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SKILLS REQUIRED OF SCA MEMBERS WHO HOLD JOBS IN BUSINESS, INDUSTRY, GOVERNMENT , AND SOCIAL SERVICE SETTINGS: THE SECOND STUDY BY THE SCA TASK FORCE ON CAREER OPPORTUNTIES

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Those of us in academe, after several years of echoing Henny Penney's cry, "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" have begun to respond more affirmatively to the facts-of-the-marketplace. We use the word "affirmatively" both because an increasing number of departments and professional organizations are working to meet the future instead of simply bemoaning the uncertainty it holds, and because increasing numbers of academics are beginning to see positive and even exciting opportunities for our students who seek positions in business, industry, government, social service organizations and in media institutions. Further, more people are coming to understand the advantages to be gained from facilitating and enriching the reciprocities between the academy and the world which is its larger context--advantages to be gained by both the academy and the rest of society.

The Speech Communication Association, which in the fall of 1978, formed a national Task Force on Career Opportunities, is among those communication-related organizations seeking to assume an institutional obligation in helping speech communication departments understand and respond to the world of work in the 1980's and beyond.[1] This is not the appropriate time to fully describe the range of activities in which the Task Force has engaged. In brief, they include sponsoring convention programs which facilitate interaction among those who work in a variety of settings, developing an internship survey of 580 departments, beginning an informal network of persons who want to discuss the curricular implications of changing job markets, facilitating an action caucus to provide recommendations for curricular responses to today's job markets,

and, this summer, planning, with the cooperation of the Association for Communication Administration and the Industrial Communications Council, two summer conferences "Careers in Communication," for those who counsel students and plan curriculum.

Among the objectives of the Task Force is obtaining and disseminating information about those skills required for a variety of jobs in both non-academic settings and in non-teaching jobs within academic settings. The results of the first of these studies will appear in a fall issue of the Bulletin of the Association for Communication Administration.[2] That first survey focused on a variety of persons who accept the generic title "communications" regardless of degree department. Today's report, the second of those surveys, focuses on SCA members in particular.

This study seeks to answer four questions: (1) What are the required skills for non-teaching jobs held by SCA members? (2) What are the required skills for entry-level jobs in fields where speech communication people hold jobs? (3) Where did speech communication people who hold non-teaching jobs acquire their skills? (4) What additional insights can we draw about non-teaching jobs held by people in speech communication?

In order to determine the skills necessary for non-teaching jobs, we sent an open-ended questionnaire to 105 SCA members whom we selected because they were listed in the 1978 SCA Directory by a business address or by a non-teaching title. In order to arrive at a more complete list we also consulted the most recently available roster of the Applied Communication Section of SCA. The questionnaire asked the recipients to list their job titles and job descriptions, to identify their jobs as entry level or non-entry

level, and to list, in order of importance, up to seven required skills for their jobs, and for related entry level jobs. It also asked them to comment on courses or experiences which they thought had helped them to obtain their skills. On the 105 questionnaires sent, 43 were returned, and only one was discarded as unusable. All but two of the remaining 42 respondents held non-entry-level jobs, and only one respondent described an academic job. Because we wanted to retain the "vocabulary" of our respondents--to describe their skills in their language--we decided not to classify the skills listed according to categories. Many of our respondents described their skills in similar terms, which allowed us to both talk about certain skills categorically and to describe the skills in terms used by our respondents.

The skill mentioned most frequently was writing. Eighty-three percent of our respondents cited some form of writing.[3] Although most simply referred to "writing" or "written communications," others were more specific, and referred to a wide variety of writing: letters, memos, reports, speeches, proposals and grants, and news releases.[4] Writing was not only mentioned more often, but was also considered more important than many other skills. One-half of all respondents listed writing as one of the three most important skills, and of the respondents who listed writing as a necessary skill, 69% ranked it as one of the three most important skills.

The second most frequently mentioned skill was speaking. Sixty-seven percent of our respondents explicitly mentioned some form of oral communication as a necessary skill. Most referred to "oral communication" or "speaking ability" in general terms. Nineteen percent referred specifically to "public speaking." Speaking

not only was required for many jobs but also ranked high in order of importance. Forty-eight percent of all respondents listed speaking as one of the three most important skills, and of the respondents who included speaking as a skill, 71% ranked it as one of the three most important.

Our respondents agreed on other skills as well. Forty percent mentioned either interpersonal or small group skills,[5] and 36% cited research skills. Organizational ability was cited by 31%, and analytic ability was mentioned by 24%. Twenty-six percent of our respondents referred to "listening" as a necessary skill. Other important skills were general management skills, which were mentioned by 26%, supervisory experience, cited by 19%, and knowledge of a particular corporation or industry, which 19% of our respondents listed. [CHART ONE]

Our respondents gave less information about entry-level skills than we had hoped they would. Of the 42 respondents, only two held entry-level jobs. We had, of course, anticipated that some respondents would not hold entry-level jobs, so we also asked the following questions:

1. If your job is not an entry-level, one, what are the entry-level jobs in your field?

2. Are the entry level skills essentially different from the ones you listed earlier? If so, what are the entry-level skills? Of the 40 respondents who held non-entry level jobs, 5 replied that there were no entry-level positions in their jobs, 11 said the skills for entry-level positions were the same, and 4 said that the skills differed in degree not kind. Twenty respondents replied by listing specific entry-level skills.

Despite the somewhat idiosyncratic nature of the replies, the following at least serve as examples of the skills required on entry-level jobs:

writing, oral communication skills, editing, interviewing, graphics/layout, basic office skills (several times including typing), and analytic skills.

When asked to comment on where they had learned the skills, our respondents mentioned a variety of sources. Many cited courses taken at both the undergraduate and graduate level. About two dozen different courses were listed by name. Of those, the ones listed most were: small group communication (8), public speaking (7), research methods (6), forensics/debate (5), interpersonal communication (5), organizational communication (4), theatre (4), journalism (3), rhetorical criticism (3), mass media (3) and persuasion (3). Other courses which were mentioned more than once were public relations, semantics, composition, business, and psychology courses. In addition to courses taken pursuant to their degrees, some respondents had taken enrichment, job-related courses at nearby community colleges and universities, for example: assertiveness training, women in management, and the like. Some respondents said that the teaching assistantships they had held as graduate students were important sources of skills.

Most respondents also pointed to learning opportunities off-campus: internships held while still pursuing their degrees, on-the-job experience after they were hired, courses and seminars taught as part of company training programs, and courses taught by professional associations. Almost all stressed the need to combine course work with practical experience gained via internships or entry-level positions.[6] For instance, one respondent said "My M.A. in speech communication provided some basic insights; other skills and training were mostly acquired on the job," and another said that "the real training which has proved most helpful has been actual on-the-job experience." "It is essential," another said, "to blend course work and on-the-job experience." "Internships are crucial," observed another.

Many respondents, particularly though not exclusively those in management positions, had also participated in company education programs. For example, they referred to courses dealing with time management, policy application, management systems, and personnel supervision. Several others reported taking courses offered by the Insurance Institute of America, Association of Deak and Derrick Clubs, Women in Communications, the Public Relations Society of America, and others.

The responses to our questionnaire allowed us to draw several conclusions. One was that personal characteristics are important. About one-third of our respondents listed what we considered to be "personal attributes" in reply to our request for skills. For example, tact, sense of humor, fairness, sense of compromise, guts, enthusiasm, and "an abiding tolerance for ambiguity" were all cited.

These characteristics did not appear to cluster in any way, although variations of patience, ability to work under pressure, and adaptability were mentioned frequently. In this light, "interpersonal" or "small group communication skill," which we defined as "skills" rather than "personal attributes," may well have been a general rubric for what some termed an "ability to get along well with others." Oh yes, one person included "integrity."

A second conclusion suggested by the responses to our questionnaire was that there are certain kinds of jobs which speech communication people are likely to hold. Many of our respondents clearly held managerial jobs, some even at the level of top management. A few held jobs that defied ready categorization. Twenty-seven (64%) of our respondents, however, held jobs that could be clearly classified as public relations, training and development, or research positions. In order to determine whether different types of jobs demanded different skills, we used the "job description" portion of our questionnaire to classify respondents according to job category. A comparison of the three categories listed above--public relations, training and development, and research and analysis--revealed that the skills for these categories differed. The 9 public relations jobs, for instance, all required some form of writing skills, and 7 required speaking skills. Management, organizational, and analytic skills were also referred to by the "public relations" respondents. Job-specific skills for this category were photography, layout and design, and broadcast or film production skills.

Of the eleven "training and development" respondents, 7 listed speaking, 6 cited writing, and 6 referred to teaching skills. Skills which seemed job specific in the "training" category were inter-

personal skills, personnel management, and the ability to use audiovisual equipment. Of the 7 respondents who held research jobs, all listed research ability as a necessary skill. Four cited statistical research, one specified market research, and the others used "research" as a general term. In contrast to the public relations and training jobs, writing and speaking were not as important here. Four respondents listed writing, 3 cited speaking, and 3 referred to analytic ability. On the other hand, some of the other skills mentioned by the researchers--persuading, interpersonal and small group skills--suggest that communication skills are still relatively important.

Our respondents offered a variety of additional insights, four of which may be particularly valuable. First, gain a better understanding of business and other non-academic settings before the job-hunting process begins. Then, those settings will seem less mysterious. Career options should be explored well before graduation, not after it. The greater the variety of settings students know about, the more intelligently they can make career choices and the more intelligently they can prepare for them.

Second, get to know a greater variety of people. This suggestion was made by several respondents, particularly those involved in training and development. For example, one said: "Get involved in teaching adults.... College students are different from foremen." Even during the intensive on-campus experience, especially for the person between 17-22, our students need to have opportunities to interact with people who are "not exactly like" them. Moreover, our graduate students may want to take more interest in teaching Continuing Education courses where often they will teach older and

more varied students. And, clearly, internships allow our students to interact with a variety of persons other than those sharing the compressed geography and metaphysics of the college campus.

Third, learn the "languages" of business and other settings. No small amount of this suggestion should also be directed at those of us who do surveys such as this one. For example, some studies provide lists of skills, shorthand job descriptions, course lists, and the like, and ask for rankings. The pervasive reason that our questions were open-ended was to let those who hold non-academic jobs tell us how they talk about them. Such interaction may well facilitate the kind of "cross-cultural" communication that must take place when we meet any persons previously outside of our experience.

Fourth, certain other insights into what one person called the "business climate" may also be useful. Sandra may be able to fill out this suggestion more directly. We will label it simply "Know more about certain aspects of job mobility in non-academic settings." For example, one person told us: "Job moves either within or outside of a company every two years are important to progress through the business hierarchy." Because so many of us see six or more years between "promotions," we simply cannot give our students such insights drawn from our own experiences.

There are several clear implications of the data reviewed in this paper. First, some curricular changes will be required. These changes will need to be of several kinds and not all of them need to be made within speech communication departments. For example, those departments which have personnel and financial resources may want to develop new areas of concentrations in communication studies

within their own departments. Still others may want to explore minors more carefully in the future and will want to participate in exploring academic clusters that cut across department lines in order to meet the needs of career preparation. The Academic Careers Clusters developed by the University of Iowa is a particularly exciting development.[7]

Curricular changes will need to involve not only courses but will require that a closer articulation be made between course content learned and competencies developed. And students will have to learn to talk about themselves not simply in terms of what courses they have taken but in terms of what skills they have.

Secondly, some of the learning that takes place will simply have to take place off campus. Internships will have a critical, not a peripheral part to play in the education of our students. They not only provide additional information about potential careers but they provide that all important "on-the-job experience."

When we consider career futures for our students (and perhaps for ourselves) two broad general observations may be useful:

1. Whatever the career goal, it is important to develop entry-level skills or "foot in the door" competencies, as well as both the broad general knowledge and job specific knowledge that will enhance the possibility of advancement on the job, and
2. In the future, as Bonham observes in Change magazine, many if not most persons will change jobs 3-4 times during their lifetimes. What he terms "human coping skills" and what others have termed "transferrable skills" will play a major role in help students to acquire the

"occupational adaptability" the future requires.[8] Those of us in speech communication have long been in the business of teaching some of those skills. Now we will need to enlarge both our repertoire of those skills and our knowledge of the variety of non-academic contexts in which they are used. That is both an exciting and a challenging prospect.

FOOTNOTES

[1] For more information on SCA's Task Force see, Progress Report" Task Force on Career Opportunities," Spectra (April, 1980), p. 13.

[2] Jane Blankenship, "An Inventory of Skills Requirements for a Variety of Non-Teaching Jobs in Non-Academic and Academic Settings," Association of Communication Administration Bulletin, (in press).

[3] Writing also scored as the skill most required in the first SCA Task Force study, in the Industrial Communications Council's study of it's members, Beyond Communications, and in the International Association of Business Communicators, Profile/1977.

[4] In company writing skills to job descriptions, it appeared that some of this writing was done for print publications such as employee newsletters, brochures for the public, and newspapers and magazines.

[5] Twenty-four percent cited interpersonal; 16% cited small group skills.

[6] The SCA Task Force summary of the internship questionnaire to five-hundred plus departments will be available at the 1980 SCA New York convention meeting of the Task Force.

[7] Nancy L. Harper, Academic Career Clusters. Multilithed project description, University of Iowa (September, 1979). See also: revised project description, January, 1980; memorandum from Nancy L. Harper to All Faculty and Staff Advisers, College of Liberal Arts, March 3, 1980; Draft letter to All Students, March 30, 1980; and, Clusters Source Book.

[8] George Bonham, "Inching Toward the Learning Society," Change (July/August, 1979).

CHART ONE

COMPARISON OF TWO SCA TASK FORCE STUDIES

The first of these studies surveyed those who used "communications" in the general sense and included not only speech graduates but English and Journalism graduates. The second study surveyed members of the Speech Communication Association.

FIRST SCA TASK FORCE STUDY ("COMMUNICATIONS")

Listed in:

First Place	Second Place	Third Place
1. Writing Skills	1. Writing Skills	1. Tied: --graphics/ design --public speaking
2. Organizing Skills	2. Editing	2. Knowledge of Business Practices
3. News Skills	3. Oral Communication Skills (not well specified)	3. Tied: --organizational skills --administrative skills
4. Tied: --Public Speaking --Analytic Skills --Interpersonal Skills	4. Tied: --Organizational Skills --Special information about corporation, etc. --Interpersonal Skills	

SECOND SCA TASK FORCE STUDY ("SCA MEMBERS")

Listed in:

First Place	Second Place	Third Place
1. Tied: --Writing Skills* --Speaking Skills	1. Writing Skills	1. Substantive knowledge of corporation, etc.
2. Teaching Skills	2. Tied: --Research Skills --Speaking Skills	2. Tied: --Writing Skills --Speaking Skills
3. Analytic Skills	3. Tied: --Listening Skills --Teaching Skills	3. Analytic Skills
4. See full text of paper for list of other skills that ranked high.		

*Varieties of kinds of writing/speaking discussed in report